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ABSTRACT

Recent theory and research on motivation has shifted in its focus from a study of more general characteristics of individuals such as personal motivational goals, to an examination of the motivation of individuals within specific domains or contexts. This change in focus has led to a broadening of the methodologies used to examine motivation. Many studies now use mixed methods. Rather than relying almost exclusively on quantitative measures such as questionnaires, researchers are incorporating qualitative measures to capture the dynamic and rich nature of learning and motivation in context. This presentation will illustrate the above trend. The presenter's work in progress will be used to discuss how insights into motivation in context might be obtained using qualitative research methodologies. Participants from the domains of sport and music have been interviewed using a range of specially designed stimulus materials and tasks to gain an understanding of their experiences within these contexts. This approach elicited participants' stories of their development and the people involved, as well as their perceptions of the different settings in which they play sport or music. Participants were asked to consider both positive and negative influences on motivation. Contains 40 references, and 3 tables and 5 figures of data. (Author/RS)

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Researching Motivation in Context:

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Researching Motivation in Context: Rethinking Methodologies.

Abstract

Recent theory and research on motivation has shifted in its focus from a study of more general characteristics of individuals such as personal motivational goals, to an examination of the motivation of individuals within specific domains or contexts. This change in focus has led to a broadening of the methodologies used to examine motivation. Many studies now use mixed methods. Rather than relying almost exclusively on quantitative measures such as questionnaires, researchers are incorporating qualitative measures to capture the dynamic and rich nature of learning and motivation in context.

This presentation will illustrate the above trend. The presenter's work in progress will be used to discuss how insights into motivation in context might be obtained using qualitative research methodologies. Participants from the domains of sport and music have been interviewed using a range of specially designed stimulus materials and tasks to gain an understanding of their experiences within these contexts. This approach elicited participants' stories of their development and the people involved, as well as their perceptions of the different settings in which they play sport or music. Participants were asked to consider both positive and negative influences on motivation.

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introduction

This paper describes work-in-progress towards a Doctoral degree in Education. The rationale behind the research questions and design is briefly presented. Tasks developed to examine the research questions are presented in detail. These reflect current conceptual and methodological aspects of research on motivation.

Shift in theory - the main concepts guiding this research

motivation

The construct of motivation is complex and multi-faceted. It is inextricably linked to all phases and facets of learning, and like self-regulation it has cognitive, affective and behavioural components that differ with different levels of expertise. Many theories of motivation, however, tend to focus on components of motivation rather than taking a holistic view.

context

As with other psychological constructs such as self-concept, historically the theoretical focus has been on how that construct manifests itself with regard to the individual. A variety of research findings, however, has demonstrated the significance of contextual factors and their impact on motivation and learning (see for example Ames, 1990; Archer, 1992; Boekaerts, 1997; Maehr & Buck, 1993; Wigfield, Eccles & Rodriguez, 1998; Volet & Järvelä, 2001). In other words, motivation is 'situated' in particular contexts. The notion of context itself is also a multi-level, dynamic and complex one. As Billett (1996, p158) suggests, "No longer is it possible to consider cognitive activities without consideration of the social and cultural context in which cognitive activity occurs".

reciprocity

A reciprocal relationship exists between the personal history and characteristics of individuals, and the contextual environments or social settings in which they participate. So different settings offer enabling or constraining features that determine whether and how particular individuals will engage with that setting. What is it that individuals bring to a setting and how do aspects of that setting enable or constrain them? What is the nature of this reciprocal relationship? From this socio-cultural perspective it may be seen that others play a crucial role in development as "individuals construct meaning for themselves but within the context of interaction with others" (Kerka, 1998, p. 2).

methodologies

The traditional way of examining phenomena in educational psychology, through experimental methods and quantitative measurement, does not seem adequate when examining complex relationships. Phenomena such as motivation may be more appropriately researched by examining real life situations and how these are experienced, perceived and understood by the people within them. Qualitative methods are better able to capture a holistic perspective, the perceptions and experiences of participants and the nature of the contexts within which phenomena occur (Berg, 1995; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Patton, 1990).

Shift in research

motivation in context

Conceptual changes such as those above have led to an increase in the incorporation of qualitative research methods when examining constructs such as motivation. For example, as Turner (2000, p. 2) points out, traditionally motivation has been studied "as if student membership in classrooms were irrelevant or noise in data analyses." Turner then suggests that "although classroom research is messy, … it is precisely this error variance that needs to be explored."

A qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach to data gathering is also evident in studies that aim to 'map' relationships rather than simply determine their frequency (Bϕ , 1996; Philip & Hendry, 1996) and to examine perceptions of athletes (Regnier, Salmela & Russell, 1993). What should be used, according to these authors, is "the collective wisdom, the rich anecdotal evidence, and the language of the sport performers themselves" (p. 291). Table 1 summarises some research studies using qualitative methods to examine situated learning and development, of which motivation is one component. The justifications for the use of qualitative methods in these studies reflect those used in the present study.

Table 1: Examples of Qualitative Research on Aspects of Motivation

Author(s)	Research Focus	Why Qualitative?
Zimmerman (1998)	learning in academic	to understand students' perspectives
Ng (1998)	contexts	motivation a process not a static trait
Locke-Davidson & Phelan (1999)	"	motivation multifaceted + complex
Turner (2000)	"	need authentic learning settings
Bloom (1985)	development of	motivation shaped by environments
Sosniak (1985b)	expertise in sporting + non-academic	motivation changes over time + influenced by many people
Regnier et al (1993)	contexts	need to examine voices of experts
Patrick et al (1999)	"	need to understand pathways of talent development as viewed by participants
Billett (1996)	"	examine links between personal histories + communities of practice
Philip & Hendry (1996)	social development of young people	need to examine perspectives of young people
Bø (1996)	"	need to consider total setting in which young people live
Yancey (1998)	"	need to understand real life settings

quantitative - qualitative issues

Quantitative methods provide powerful, succinct, statistical portrayals, but this may oversimplify the complexities of real-world experiences, may miss major factors of importance that are not easily quantified, and may fail to portray the sense of the 'whole' situation (Patton, 1990). To address these concerns, this study adopts a qualitative approach which "gathers data on multiple aspects of the setting under study in order to assemble a comprehensive and complete picture of the social dynamic of the particular situation" (p. 50).

Some supporters of quantitative methodologies would say that qualitative research relies on "softer, interpretive methods" that are "unreliable, impressionistic, and not objective" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.5). Issues raised include the effect of the researcher on the supposedly 'natural' settings or on the individuals involved. There may also be concerns about a lack of systematic and rigorous testing of variables and theories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) or about a lack of scientific rigour and the credibility and usefulness of resultant research findings (Patton, 1990). Others have expressed concerns about 'soft' science which uses a personal rather than objective approach, is open to bias, and is even seen as an "attack on reason and truth" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.4).

Various authors suggest ways of addressing the possible threats to the credibility of qualitative research. For example Maxwell (1998) proposes the use of a validity checklist that allows the researcher to actively look for evidence of such threats to credibility in the data, or to investigate them directly in the research process. The checklist includes: searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases; using quasi-statistics; incorporating various forms of triangulation; obtaining feedback from the researcher's peers about the whole research process and the inferences drawn; verifying conclusions with participants; obtaining and displaying rich data; and using appropriate forms of comparison. Others suggest similar strategies, many of which will be incorporated into the present study (see for example Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Berg, 1995; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1998).

Table 2 summarises some major differences between quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. If viewed as a dichotomy, quantitative methods are seen to be deductive, verificative, enumerative and objective. Qualitative methods, in contrast, are seen to be inductive, generative, constructive and subjective (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). These authors suggest, however, that it is more appropriate to view the two methods as being on a continuum with respect to these features. Rather than exclusive dichotomies, they say that extremes are rare and it is more likely that various combinations will apply. Similarly Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.5) maintain that different research styles are simply "doing the same things differently". Specific methodologies are not exclusive to any particular paradigm, theory or discipline. This study, however, does incorporate many of the features of qualitative research listed in Table 2 (adapted from Goetz & LeCompte,1984; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Table 2: Features of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods of Inquiry

feature	quantitative	qualitative
Role of theory	Deduction: begins with theory + matches empirically to body of data	Induction: begin with data + hope to find theory to explain data
Goal of research	Verification: establish extent to which proposition obtains + universe of populations to which it's applicable	Generation: aim to discover or understand constructs and propositions using data as sources of evidence
Focus of research	Products: stress measurement + analysis of causal relationships between variables; inquiry in value free framework	Processes: stress socially constructed nature of reality, relationship between researcher and what is studied, + situational constraints shaping inquiry
Units of analysis	Enumeration: previously defined units systematically counted or enumerated	Construction: units become apparent in course of observation + description
Objectivity	Objective: external observers apply externally derived conceptual categories + explanations	Subjective: reconstruct specific categories participants use to conceptualise own experiences
Position re the world	Etic: seldom study world directly; base findings on probabilities from study of large numbers of randomly selected cases	Emic: see the world in action + embed findings within it; direct attention to specifics of particular cases
Role of detail	Reductionist: aim for generalisable abstractions	Descriptive: believe rich description is valuable
Position of author	Impersonal + objective: use of third person prose in writing	Personal + subjective: may use first person in writing

this study

research questions

The main research question for this study is: "What is the nature of the relationship between an individual and a context in relation to motivation?" This broad area of inquiry is then broken down into three further questions:

- How do aspects of an individual's personal history shape the motivation that they bring to a particular setting?
- How do aspects of contexts shape or impact on motivation?
- How is the motivation of individuals revealed in particular contexts?

research methods

A qualitative approach is seen to be most appropriate to address the research questions being posed in this study. The overall method used is that of a 'collective case study' in which particular cases are selected for study because a better understanding of them will lead to a better understanding of a particular phenomenon, or will allow theorising about a larger number of cases (Stake, 1994). Two types of cases are used in this research, with each individual regarded as a case, and each level of context also regarded as a case.

Motivation is situated within contexts that differ in their levels of specificity. In this study the contexts of interest are the broad level of domain (music and sport), communities of practice (such as schools or teams), settings (such as practice or performance) and particular tasks or activities. Sport and music were selected as the domains of study because of perceived similarities between them. Both require lengthy periods of individual skill development – often beginning during early school years, both generally incorporate some individual and group activities, both demand demonstration of competence or expertise through a performance component, and experts in both fields are highly regarded in our society.

Thirty athletes and musicians were interviewed twice. Participants were all relative experts in their fields and numbers were equally divided between athletes and musicians, between males and females, and between younger and more experienced participants. These criteria were used to locate and select participants. Only those participating in teams or ensembles were selected.

The participants in this study then were individuals who are 'motivated' in the broad contexts (domains) of sport and music. Their motivational beliefs, feelings and actions were examined. In-depth interviews and specially designed tasks were used to construct their personal histories – the paths that have led them to their current situation. Their perceptions of the various contexts they have experienced were also explored to gain an understanding of how these contexts have shaped their motivation to continue in that domain.

materials / methods

All participants were interviewed on two occasions within a twelve month period. As part of those interviews, they were asked to complete various tasks as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Tasks Developed for this Study

Task Used in Study	Focus of Inquiry	Interview
Time-Line Task	Key events in past and present ie developmental history in relation to sport or music	Interview 1
Circles of Influence Task	Key people in past and present in relation to sport or music	Interview 1
A Day in the Life Task	Key activities and events in present and related beliefs and feelings	Between Interviews
Settings Chart Task	Key activities and events in present and related beliefs and feelings	Interview 2
Issues Sorting Task	Difficulties/issues encountered in past + present and strategies used to manage them	Interview 2

The Time Line Task

The Time Line Task was designed to gain information about each participant's developmental history in relation to his or her participation in sport or music. It also aimed at activating memories of key events and people from the past in preparation for the Circles of Influence Task. The contribution of previous experiences to later involvement in the domains of sport and music has been shown to be important (Sosniak, 1985a; 1985b). The Task followed a logical order and began with questions about getting started and concluded with questions about current involvement in the domain. The Time Line Task essentially used a visual representation of the relevant stages of development (see Figure 1) on an A4 sheet of paper in conjunction with the general question "Can you remember the different stages of your involvement with sport / music?" Details about participation in school and community activities, about teachers and coaches, about the involvement of family and friends, and about special programs or awards were elicited in order to gain a comprehensive picture of development in the relevant domain.

Figure 1: Time Line Task

PRE-SCHOOL YEARS AGES: 0-5	PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS AGES: 6-12	SECONDARY YEARS AGES: 13-17	EARLY ADULT YEARS AGES: 18-21	LATER ADULT YEARS AGES: 21+

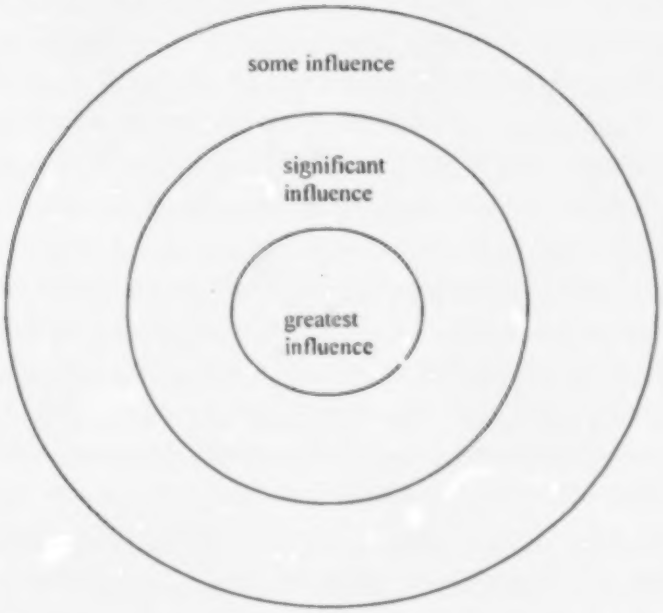
The Circles of Influence Task

The Circles of Influence Task was used to determine who the influential people (both past and present) were for individuals in their development as athletes and musicians, and the nature of their influence. The task consisted of four parts (see Figure 2). Participants first were asked to write in the names of influential people in concentric circles on an A3 sheet of paper. They were then asked the nature of their relationship with all those named (eg friend, teacher, family member etc) and to give an example of how that person had influenced them. Participants were then shown a list of additional categories and asked if there was anyone else who came to mind from those categories who may have been influential. Finally participants were asked to think about anyone who might have had a negative influence – who made it more difficult for them to continue in sport or music. These names were not recorded on the circles.

Using concentric circles as a tool to develop a visual representation of social networks has been used by a number of researchers (for example Neilsen & Bowes, 1996; Pearpoint, Forest & O'Brien, 1996). Questions similar to those developed for this task have also been used extensively for similar purposes (Bø, 1996; Galbo & Demetrulias, 1996; Greenberger, Chen & Beam, 1998; Hamilton & Darling,, 1989; Patrick, Ryan, Alfeld-Liro, & Fredricks, 1999; Philip & Hendry, 1996; Sosniak, 1985b; Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996). In addition, Zimmerman (1998, p.75) suggests that socially self-regulated students "are aware of how study partners, coaches, or instructors can help or hinder their learning" and the questions designed for this study assumed a level of awareness.

The present study differed from some of the above in that it focused on the domains of sport and music rather than for example asking about life in general or about friendships. Another difference is that both unprompted recollections as well as specifically determined categories of responses were used in an effort to broaden the range of those who participants might consider to be in their networks of influence. A final, relatively unique, feature of the task as used in this study is that both positive and negative examples of influences were elicited.

Figure 2: The Circles of Influence Task



Instructions:
This study is particularly interested in how other people have influenced you and I'd like you to think about people who have helped you or influenced you in your development as a musician / sportsperson.

Circles task.

i) The circles represent the degree of influence with those in the centre being the most influential. Write the names of people who you think should go in each of the circles – think about past and present influences.

ii) For each person in the circles, what is your relationship with them and in what way was this person influential?

iii) Can you think of a specific example of when they have influenced you?

iv) Now look at the categories of different people. Are there any people from these categories you would include in your circles of influence? – repeat ii + iii.

v) We've been considering positive influences. Can you think of times when someone has, perhaps even unintentionally, made it more difficult for you to continue in music / sport? – repeat ii + iii.

Other Categories

- immediate family
- relatives
- close friends
- known directly eg coaches, tutors, teachers, team mates etc
- known less directly eg acquaintances, others in organisation
- real people not personally known eg celebrities, media reports of performances etc
- onlookers eg audience, spectators etc
- fictional characters eg via literature, TV, movies etc

The A Day in the Life Task

The A Day in the Life Task (see Figure 3) served three purposes. It gave the researcher an indication of day to day current activities of participants and of their perceptions of those activities. The task also acted as a bridge between the two interviews. Participants were given the task on an A4 sheet of paper with an explanation at the end of Interview 1. Twenty-four of the thirty participants completed the activity.

The task allowed the participants to contribute to the research in that they were free to select any day they wished. They were asked to preferably choose a day that involved sport or music but some did not do this. Whatever day was selected, the researcher was able to ask whether it was a typical day or an unusual one and why. Questions and comments about the task were incorporated naturally into the second interview where they seemed to be most appropriate.

Figure 3: A Day in the Life Task

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF .....

Imagine that a TV documentary is being made of your life. Select one day and briefly record the activities you undertake at different times, and make a note of any other people involved.

No activity is too mundane to include but some privacy is also allowed! Choose any day you wish but try and cover the whole day from beginning to end.

Space is also provided for comments such as whether this was a particularly enjoyable or boring activity, whether this is a very common or unusual activity etc. Use the back of the sheet if you need to.

When you have completed the task, please return it to me in the envelope provided. Thanks.

time	activity	others involved	comment
Morning *eg 7-7.15*	*breakfast*	*family – give names*	*rushed – up too late*
Afternoon *eg 5.00-6.00*	*practiced difficult skill*	*alone*	*still hard!*
Evening *eg 7.00-8.00*	*watched TV*	*Joe + Flo – friends*	*good to relax*

Date of Record: _____

The Settings Chart Task

The aim of the Settings Chart Task was to obtain an understanding of the nature of both the settings in which participants practiced and performed, and of their perceptions of those settings. In the second interview participants were presented with an A3 chart representing the various settings in which they played sport or music (see Figure 4). They were asked to assist the researcher by explaining what should be in each section of the chart for each setting in which they participated. The researcher wrote brief comments in relevant sections to use as a visual prompt. On completion of the chart participants were asked various questions comparing each setting.

Figure 4: The Settings Chart Task and Questions

Name: _____ Date: ___ STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: DETAILS OF SETTINGS

SETTING	WHEN? number sessions per week / length	WHERE? location	WHO? other people / roles	WHAT? things / equipment	WHAT? activities / tasks	WHY? who decides what + why?
individual training / practice						
group training / practice						
group competi-tion / concert						
other						

Questions about settings:

- Which setting do you find the most /least enjoyable? Why?
- Which is the most/ least interesting? Why?
- Which setting is the most / least important? Why?
- Which setting would you say you are the most 'motivated' to participate in? Why?
- Other comments about similarities or differences between settings?

Ideally in qualitative research methods, settings of interest are observed directly by the researcher. The participants in this study acted as observers in that they described in detail the various settings in which they practiced and performed. Even if direct observation is used, it is impossible for an observer to observe every setting or everything within a particular setting (Hammersley & Atkinson,1983). An observer who is not an expert in a particular domain or not very familiar with a particular setting may miss crucial aspects of that setting, or may interpret what is seen in a different way to those who are an integral part of it. Even if direct observation by the researcher occurs, consideration of participants' perceptions and understandings is also needed (Berg, 1995) and so it is legitimate to ask various informants about their everyday activities and about their perceptions and understandings of those activities (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Fetterman, 1998).

The sections at the top of the chart in Figure 4 (what? when? etc) aimed at gaining a comprehensive picture of each setting and were based on ideas from a number of sources, as were the questions at the end of the task. For example Zimmerman (1998) uses the categories of "Why? How? When? What? and With Whom?" when examining the dimensions of self-regulation and discusses the importance of comparing methods of self-regulation across disciplines. When studying any social situation, Tripp (1994) suggests that there are at least five key components that must be considered: people, things, events, context and relationships. These are expressed as a four part question: (a) who, (b) with what? (c) experiences what? (d) when, where and with whom? The Settings Chart Task and related questions use a combination of the above categories.

The Issues Sorting Task

During Interview 1 various issues or difficulties faced by participants during their lives as athletes and musicians were raised. The Issues Sorting Task (see Figure 5) was developed to gauge to what extent those issues were common across participants and across domains. Discussion about the various issues was used as a means to identify motivational strategies known and / or used by participants.

Problem solving tasks have been widely used in research to tap into different types of expert knowledge (see for example Billet, 1996; Regnier et al, 1993). Self-regulated learners are able to systematically adapt strategies to changing personal and contextual conditions and are able to independently choose when and how to use particular strategies (Zimmerman, 1998). The questions used in the Issues Sorting Task were designed to elicit declarative, procedural, conditional and metacognitive knowledge about motivational strategies.

The Issues Sorting Task followed the Settings Chart Task in Interview 2 and used the same distinction between individual practice, group practice / rehearsal / training and group performance / competition. A further group of issues ('Other') was included that were applicable across settings. All participants were given the same set of paper slips with the issues written on them and were asked to sort them into the same categories by placing each slip on an A4 sheet of paper with the categories on it. Blank slips were available if other issues were raised, but no suggestions were made.

Figure 5: The Issues Sorting Task

Categories for Sorting Issues

A. SITUATIONS NEVER ENCOUNTERED	B. SITUATIONS SOMETIMES OR OCCASIONALLY ENCOUNTERED	C. SITUATIONS OFTEN OR REGULARLY ENCOUNTERED

Issues in Individual Practice / Training Settings

I.1. finding time	I.5. expenses involved
I.2.finding a suitable place	I.6. getting started
I.3. loss or change of teacher / coach	I.7. lack of interesting or enjoyable tasks
I.4. getting the right equipment / facilities	I.8. negative comments from family / onlookers

Issues in Group Practice / Rehearsal / Training Settings

GT.1. finding time	GT.6. not getting along with coach / conductor
GT.2. transport of self / equipment	GT.7. negative comments from coach / conductor
GT.3. joining a new group or team	GT.8. difficult or uninteresting tasks / activities
GT.4. not getting along with team-mates / fellow musicians	GT.9. feelings of wasting time
GT.5. negative comments from team-mates / fellow musicians	GT.10. lack of opportunities

Issues in Group Performance / Competition Settings

GC.1. time / transport / expenses involved	GC.5. errors or unfair decisions by an umpire / conductor
GC.2. not being selected for the competition / concert	GC.6. equipment failure
GC.3. making an obvious error	GC.7. competing against better teams / groups
GC.4. errors by team-mate / fellow musicians	GC.8. negative feedback from spectators / audience
GC.9. playing badly overall in that situation	

Other Issues Across Settings

O.1. personal injury	O.3. negative press reports / reviews / appraisals / adjudications
O.2. an important change in family circumstances such as leaving home or the breaking up of a relationship	O.4. major decision such as focusing on one instrument or sport

NB: these last issues were sorted as 'encountered' or 'never encountered' rather than into three categories, or they were simply discussed

Examples of Questions Used for Discussing Issues

- What was the situation for you? What happened?
- How did you handle the situation? What exactly did you do?
- Was this typical of how you would respond?
- Are there any times when you didn't or wouldn't react this way?
- How do other people handle this type of issue?
- Does your coach / teacher ever talk about how to handle this issue?
- What advice might you give to someone in a similar situation?

NB: These questions varied depending on participants' previous responses. In general issues said to occur most often were discussed. Some participants said no issues occurred frequently for them and so possible reasons for this were discussed.

conclusion

In conclusion, when research aims to understand motivation and related constructs in terms of how they develop and are enacted in various real life settings qualitative methods are seen to be appropriate. They are able to capture the experiences of individuals over time and features of their environments, including the people within them, which have positively and negatively influenced motivation to learn and perform. Qualitative methods are better able to capture a holistic perspective, include the perceptions and experiences of participants and to reflect the contexts within which phenomena occur. Therefore a qualitative approach is most appropriate to address the research questions being posed in this study. Various tasks have been designed to gather information that will address these questions.

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